

Testimony in favor of SB438 to make May Permanently Lyme Disease Awareness Month in Connecticut.

My name is Elena Zajac and I am from Cromwell. I have been sick since at least September of 1998. I have Late Stage Neurological Lyme Disease and co-infections that went undiagnosed and then misdiagnosed for at least 15 years. Both my 11 year old and 9 year old sons and my husband also have Lyme Disease and co-infections. This disease desperately needs awareness brought to it. It has changed our lives in every way imaginable from the physical to the financial. We can't afford the co-pays, medications, supplements, and healthy food needed to treat these illnesses. Insurance doesn't recognize Chronic Lyme or cover the IV antibiotics I must infuse myself at home twice a day through a port in my chest because my insurance won't cover nursing service for Lyme Disease. The cost of my medication and supplies alone are equivalent to a second mortgage payment each month, never-mind the costs associated to treat my husband and two sons. I am here today to testify in favor of the Lyme Disease Awareness Month portion of SB438 because this disease has reached pandemic status around the world and is endemic to Connecticut. Treating this disease financially ruins families and many people like myself have become disabled from the disease. However, this level of devastation is preventable with education and the only way to educate the public is through awareness. Unfortunately other statewide awareness efforts like the "BLAST" Lyme Disease prevention education program created by the Ridgefield Lyme Disease Task force in conjunction with Lyme Connection was redlined due to the state budget. SB438 is now more important than ever because another way of spreading awareness and educating the public is needed before Lyme Disease and other tick borne infections wipe out our future generations.

Lyme Disease is spreading rapidly, especially here in Connecticut where results from the state's tick testing program were just released on February 22nd. According to the New London Day, "Thirty-one percent of blacklegged ticks submitted to the Tick Testing Laboratory at the Connecticut Agricultural Station tested positive for the bacteria that causes Lyme Disease, *Borrelia burgdorferi*." This number represents an increase of, "nearly six percent from an average of 26 percent over the last five years of testing from 2010 to 2014." Keep in mind that these numbers only represent the ticks that were found on humans and submitted for testing. There are hundreds, if not thousands of ticks that bite people without them knowing it, or without them knowing to save the tick once they remove it. Again, another reason that this bill is so very important. I have personal first hand experience with not knowing that tick testing was even available to the public and missed the opportunity to send in ticks that I have pulled off my children. I have also sent two ticks in this past year and one did come back positive for Lyme Disease. This bill would provide an opportunity for cities and towns across the state to educate the public about prevention and to raise awareness that such services exist. The sooner you find out that you have been exposed to Lyme Disease, the sooner treatment can begin. When you wait too long to treat this disease you end up like me having to treat long term. We can keep people off disability with a bill like this.

I don't want to see any more Connecticut families going through what we are. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today on behalf of those who suffer from Lyme Disease already here in Connecticut.